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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the use of Spanish first names as a tool for teaching Hispanic culture first looks at a survey of names existing in a small New Mexican town in the 1880s and examines the usefulness of this information in classroom teaching. The frequency, definitions, and cultural implications of male, female, and double-gender names are outlined: names having religious meaning; those characterizing personal demeanor or disposition; names denoting virtue, war-like characteristics, physical characteristics, or aspects of nature or animals; and miscellaneous names. The information about age or social traditions available in first names is discussed. The relative lack of nicknames or shortened forms is also noted as an indicator of social values. It is proposed that: Spanish first names are ideally suited for the study of civilization, oral literature, and folklore classes; religious first names reflect the importance of religion in Hispanic communities; double-gender names show the importance of the baptismal ritual and of the loyalty inherent in the parent/godparent relationship; Spanish first names give insight to some behaviors and trends; and names should be discussed in the classroom whenever appropriate. (MSE)

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TEACHING HISPANIC CULTURE USING SPANISH FIRST-NAMES*

SPANISH GIVEN NAMES: BACKGROUND

The ecclesiastical calendar of saints has been, for time inmemoriam, the primary source of Spanish first-names or given names (nombres de pila) in the Hispanic world. This is, to a large extent, still true today. However, in New Mexico, a state with a long-standing Hispanic tradition dating back to the first-third of the 16th century, the use of saints' names has abated, except perhaps, in some remote villages in northern New Mexico where people still cling steadfastly to many of their cultural traditions. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that numerous given names are no longer used; they have, in fact, fallen into disuse. In some cases, new first-names have been adopted, but this phenomenon is of more recent vintage.

What I would like is to share with you Spanish first-names, both female and male, that existed during the 1880s in the tiny village of Guadalupe (Ojo del Padre) in the Río Puerco Valley about forty miles northwest of Albuquerque where I grew up. (Incidentally, the village today is one of four Hispanic ghost towns on the Río Puerco whose demise came after World War II). The underlying pedagogical purpose is to demonstrate how,

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through first-names, one can learn about: (1) certain cultural traits indigenous to Hispanic communities like Guadalupe; (2) the implications of double genders; (3) the existence of diminutives and the significance of first-names as age indicators; and (4) the fact that few nicknames or apocopated forms of names actually existed in Guadalupe. Similarly, and by extension, one may be able to replicate the foregoing aspects in other similar communities.

Demographics

Let us examine briefly some demographic statistics. According to census data, Guadalupe in the 1880s, approximately one hundred years after the first settlement, had a population of one hundred sixty-one inhabitants--86 males and 75 females, including children. Most of the people had migrated from the Río Grande Valley in search of a better living because of feeling "crowded" in places like Albuquerque due to the influx of "foreigners" who had begun to settle in New Mexico.

Frequency of Male Names

The main focus of my talk is, as stated earlier, to explore the pedagogical value of Spanish first-names, but let me begin by "breaking down" these names in Guadalupe according to their frequency.

Of the 86 males, here is a breakdown in terms of frequency of usage:

José--18

(or some combination thereof)

Juan--6

Jesús--3

(or some combination thereof)

Antonio--2

Toribio--2

Albino--2

Approximately 22% of the male names (35 in total) fall into this first grouping.

DEFINITIONS AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The categories proposed below along with their meanings may be of value to us as classroom teachers in assessing the cultural implications of communities such as Guadalupe. (I should add parenthetically that Spanish first-names are ideally suited for oral literature or folklore classes).

Religious Names

The first three names, José, Juan, and Jesús, are all related to religion. José connotes "the Lord addeth;" Juan means "the Lord is merciful"; and Jesús signifies "the Lord is my salvation." These three names represent a total of twenty-seven (27) names out of 86. Other names, eleven (11) in total, related to religion are:

Anastacio--Who shall rise again

Daniel--God is my judge

Diego--From Santiago (St. James)

Elías--God the Lord

Esquipula--Shrine renovated in Esquipulas, Guatemala

Julio--God

Manuel--The Lord is with us

Natividad--Birth

Rafael--Healing of God

Teodoso--Divine gift

Trinidad--Religious term "three in one"

Thus, approximately thirty-eight (38) male names out of 86, about 44%, pertain to religion.

Personal Demeanor or Disposition

Names representing man's personal demeanor or disposition numbered nine (9) in total. They are:

Benigno--Friendly and king

Benito--Speaks well of others

Bibián--Lively

Evaristo--Agreeable

Gregorio--Watchful

Nepomuceno--Quiet or speechless

Severino--Serious or strict

Toribio--Rowdy

These constitute approximately 6% of the village's population.

Virtue

Those that represent virtue, for example Antonio, "the priceless one," and Ambrocio meaning "immortality," listed above among seven (7) of the most common male names in Guadalupe, are accompanied by others such as Andrez (manly), Bonifacio (doer of good), Catalino (pure), Cleofes (fame of his father), and

Fernando (courageous in peace). These last five (5) names, coupled with Antonio and Ambrocio, add up to seven (7) or 5% of the village's population.

War-like Characteristics

Those names used in the village of Guadalupe, seven (7) in total, with war-like characteristics are:

Aniceto--Unconquerable

Cesario--Imperial majesty

Eduvigen--Battle warrior

Fernando--Shield of the army

Lauriano--Glory

Luis--Famous warrior

Nicolás--Conqueror of peoples

These names appeared only one time each in the census, but they represent about 5% of the village's population.

Physical Characteristics

If we speak of names that pertain to physical characteristics such as Albino (fair complexion), we find others like Crecencio (growing), Julio (wavy hair), Pablo (little) and Pedro Amado (rock-solid). Thus, five (5) names in total, approximately 3% of the total population, represent those with physical characteristics.

Nature or Animals

Those names representing nature or animals, six (6) in total, are:

Avelino--Hazelnut

Silverio--Forest

Carpio--Fruit

Felipe--Lover of horses

Leandro--Lion man

Leon--Bold, brave and lordly; lion

Pantaleón--Powerful like a lion

These account for almost 4% of the community's population

Miscellaneous

Lastly, the following two names, Enrique (master of the house), and Serapio (high Egyptian divinity), could have been placed under virtue and religion, respectively, but technically they are separate and apart from these two last categories.

As one can readily see, male Spanish first-names fall into five categories: religion; those dealing with one's personality or demeanor; war; virtue; and nature and animals. Perhaps none of these should surprise us, especially if one considers that they are all-encompassing, that is, from a universal as well as a local point of view. Finally, each reflects a cultural and personal attribute in concert with the environment people inhabited as a result of their own creation and evolution.

Frequency of Female Names

Of the 75 females names that existed in Guadalupe in the 1880s, María, in one form or another, dominated the list with 15, followed by Juana (5 times), Francisca (3), Rita (3), and several others appearing two times, plus those that appeared once, for a total of 47. Twenty-eight (28) names appeared only once.

Religious Names

María, meaning "pleasant or gentlewomen or queen," which also "honors Christ's mother," along with Juana, meaning "the Lord is merciful," accounted for twenty (20) of the 75 names. Other names related to religion are:

Anastacia--Who shall rise again

Angela--Angel or messenger

Beatriz--Blessed

Concepción--To conceive (spiritual name)

Dolores--Sorrows (title given to the Virgin Mary)

Emilia--Grace

Josefa--The Lord addeth (off-spring)

Juana María--The Lord is merciful

Luz--To light up

Manuela--The Lord is with us

Margarita--Child of light

Micaela--There is none like God

Piedad--Devotion to God

Rafaela--Healing to God

Trinidad--Three in one (spiritual name)

Virginia--Virgin, maidenly

These sixteen (16) names, plus the twenty for María and Juana, add up to thirty-six (36). Almost 50% of all female names, slightly higher than the percentage for male names, relate to religion.

Personal Demeanor or Disposition

The names representing these characteristics are:

Benigna--Friendly and kind

Elena--The brilliant one

Eutemia--In good spirits

Eutimia--In good spirits

Francisca--Free or genuine

Gregoria--Watchful

Plácida--Pleasant

These names, seven (7) in total, constitute the same number as male names, although only two (Benigno-a and Gregorio-a) are identical. The seven account for approximately 4% of the total population of the community.

Virtue

Female names comprising this characteristic number only three (3), considerably lower than their male counterparts. They are:

Adelaida--Of noble birth

Eufemia--Enjoys a good reputation

Gertrudis--Faithful to her home

No conclusion, erroneous or speculative, should be drawn from these low numbers.

War-like Characteristics

Those female names in Guadalupe related to war-like characteristics number five (5), or about 3% of the village's population. These names are:

Elvira--Friendly lance; warrior's friend

Marcelina--Of Mars (god of war)

Merced--Reward or pardon

Teresa--Consecrated to the goddess who watched over the thrashing of grains; huntress

Victoria--Conqueror

Physical Characteristics

Female names that deal with physical characteristics are seven (7) in total:

Albina--Fair complexion

Cesaria--Having abundant hair

Cecilia--Blind

Cornelia--Woman with horns (invulnerable to arrows)

Higinia--Healthy and strong

Paula--Little

Petra--Rock (solid)

These names represent approximately 4% of the entire community population.

Nature or Animals

Only four (4) female names related to nature or animals appeared, about 3% of the population. They are:

Avelina--From the hazelnut

Genovena--White as a sea wave

Delfinia--Dolphin

Rosa--Rose (flower)

Miscellaneous

Names that do not fall within any of the previous categories cited are:

Cenovia--Common life

Gavina--From the town of Gabii (Italy)

Marta--Lady of the household

Rita--Custom, habit

Sara--Princess

In comparing male and female names, no firm deductions or implications should be drawn. Their symbolic meanings more than likely should also not be taken literally; rather, they are perhaps symptomatic of keeping the name(s) alive within a family more for personal reasons first, and traditional second.

DOUBLE GENDER NAMES

My initial intention was to discuss unisexual names and their distribution, but, ironically, only one unisexual name (Trinidad) was recorded in the entire Guadalupe community of one hundred sixty-one inhabitants. Even the name Guadalupe, patron saint of the village, does not appear in the 1880 census. Perhaps it is because Guadalupe also means "black river." The river running through the community, as noted earlier, is called Río Puerco, "dirty river," but the similarities in meaning are probably coincidental at best, and not a valid explanation as to why Guadalupe was not used as a first-name.

Eleven names having dual genders existed in Guadalupe. They are:

Albino(a)--Fair complexion--physical

Anastacio(a)--Who shall rise again--religious

Antonio(a)--Priceless one--virtue

Avelino(a)--From the hazelnut--nature

Benigno(a)--Friendly and kind--demeanor

Cesario(a)--Imperial majesty--war-like

Gregorio(a)--Pleasant--demeanor

José (Josefa)--The Lord addeth--religious

Juan(a)--The Lord is merciful--religious

Manuel(a)--The Lord is with us--religious

Rafael(a)--Healing of God--religious

As far as the use of double gender names is concerned, several explanations are possible. Traditionally when padrinos or godparents were asked to be the so-called sponsors of a child at baptism, they adhered to certain cultural precepts regardless whether the padrinos were immediate or extended family members. The compadres or co-sponsors ordinarily chose the name(s) of their ahijado(a) or godchild. The selection of the name itself depended on several factors. For example, was the child the first son or daughter, or perhaps the first grandson or granddaughter? If so, then it was customary for the son to be named after the father or one of the two grandfathers. However, if the child was a daughter, it was more likely for her to be named Albina, after the father or even one of the grandfathers on either side of the family. In some cases, although not as frequently, the child or daughter was named after the mother or

paternal or maternal grandmother.

In examining the 1880s Guadalupe census, it is clear that feminine names such as Antonia and others stemmed from some sort of male/ padrino dominance, respect or admiration. The reverse is not necessarily true or evident, that is, whereby a son was baptized Cornelio after the mother or one of the grandmothers.

After the padrinos got passed their initial research of whether the son or daughter was the first born in the family, then they commanded and were "permitted" certain latitude. For example, the padrinos/compadres generally attempted to select a name known to be a favorite one of the parents, or perhaps a name that had some significance within the family history, either in popularity, or due to some misfortune (death through accident), in which case they wished to keep the name "alive." The idea of reviving or keeping a name alive was common. Through all of the cultural traditions, what the padrinos attempted to do was to please their future compadres--not the godchild! To be sure, the padrinos were not remotely concerned about their ahijada being named Anastacia, Eutemia, or Adelaida.

Furthermore, children in Hispanic communities of New Mexico long ago do not seem to have been as prone to making fun of their peers' names as is the case today. Baptizing a child nowadays with a name like Eduvigen or Cesaria seems highly unlikely in most parts of New Mexico. If given these names, those children very quickly would become Ed and Cessie, respectively. And it is not something that would originate at home, but rather at school

(the teacher), or with their classmates. This practice has been in vogue for a long time.

One final note with regard to double gender names and their cultural value is in order. Guadalupe, like many other Hispanic communities in New Mexico, was not immune from superstitions, like the evil eye (el mal ojo). The Juan or Juana had the power to lift the evil eye; therefore every community had its share of Juans or Juanas.

These are some of the considerations in explaining to students the importance and possible understanding of the existence of double gender names in a small Hispanic community.

FIRST-NAMES AS AGE INDICATORS AND DIMINUTIVES

First-names can provide us with invaluable information pursuant to a person's age or certain traditions. For example, some names are no longer fashionable, which means that they have fallen into disuse. In Guadalupe, where I grew up, this phenomenon seems to have begun to occur after about 20-30 years following the 1880 census. In checking the baptismal records of the Archives of the Archdiocese for 1897-1904, many names like Gertrudis, Emilia, Teodoso, María, Teodora, Antonio, and Rogeria are still evident. But, names like Anastacio(a), Eduvigen, Cenovia, Manuela, Nepomuceno, Serapio, Severo and Plácida are absent. By the 1940s only some names from the 1880s like Antonio, Juan, José, Diego, Emilia, Pedro, and Elvira, are still in existence. New names also like Macario, Damiano, Salvador, Demetrio, Melesia, and Eremita begin to appear.

While this was going on, two distinctly different phenomena began to occur simultaneously at the start of this century in Guadalupe. For example, due to the migration of English-speaking merchants to the Río Puerco Valley where Guadalupe existed, coupled with mixed marriages and the mixture of Anglo and Spanish names, an influence in the manner with which some children were named started to evolve. At the same time, we begin to see the use and introduction of diminutives like Angelita, Julianita, Adelita, Vicentita, Inesita, Teodorita, Juanita, and Susanita. In fact, many of the women from Guadalupe whom I have interviewed during the past twelve years, were given a diminutive name at baptism.

In addition to the migration of English-speakers to Guadalupe and mixed marriages, some neighboring villages had already experienced the use of diminutives. These had been introduced as a result of their prevalence in Jémez Pueblo where many of the children from Guadalupe were baptized at the turn of the century and where church records were kept. The use of diminutives, of course, existed in the Río Grande Valley prior to being introduced to the Jémez Pueblo Indians and henceforth the Río Puerco Valley.

What can we conclude from the use or existence of first-names as far as using them to determine the age of an individual? If we were to open a telephone directory today in New Mexico, especially in rural areas, and ferret out Spanish first-names seemingly exotic or esoteric, it is fair to conclude at least two

things: (1) the person is old and of another generation; or (2) the "poor person" is younger and a "victim" of tradition in one form or another in a family perhaps not in touch with the outside world. How many of us today would think of naming our child Bonifacio, Cenovia, Aniceto, or Josefa? Names, like some fashions, come and go, with the exception that countless Spanish first-names have disappeared--and will continue to do so, without ever returning again.

NICKNAMES AND SHORTENED FORMS

While it may sound strange, in Guadalupe, unlike many Hispanic communities, nicknames or shortened versions of first-names is something that did not appear to be fashionable as evidenced by the research that I have conducted through my oral literature interviews over the past twelve years. People I knew--and know even today-- did not have nicknames. My cousin Catalina was never Cata. My mother Agapita was never referred to as Pita. My paternal grandmother, Emilia, was always Emilia or Doña Emilia and never Lila, although the grandchildren did refer to her affectionately as Lale. Occasionally, an exception could be found, whereby Lina from Adelina was not a nickname per se, but a shortened form with which this person had been baptized.

As far as male nicknames or shortened forms are concerned, these appear to have been more prevalent among men. José was always José or Don José, but never Che or Chepe. On the other hand, I remember that my cousin Higinio was Jiño, Hilario was Lalo, and Maclovio was Maque, but these were more the exception

than the rule.

What can we conclude from the scarcity of nicknames or shortened forms of Spanish first-names in communities like the one where I grew up? It certainly was not due to lack of imagination or creativity among children or adults. Being a "José María" in my community meant a "cheapskate." A person who was habitually late was dubbed siempre anda con las medias caidas. If a young man was good at beating up others, he was known as saca mocos. Countless other examples exist, but nicknames in a traditional sense were not common, and, perhaps it was because they never were introduced from the Río Grande Valley where they tend to be more prevalent even today. Nevertheless, it seems more colorful, to be sure, in explaining a cultural environment and its idiosyncrasies to students by saying saca mocos instead of Che or Chepe for José.

In summary, the following conclusions regarding Spanish first-names can be drawn: (1) they are ideally suited for civilization, oral literature, and folklore classes; (2) communities like Guadalupe where I grew up may indeed serve as a microcosm for larger Hispanic communities in New Mexico or the Southwest, as well as a model for similar size communities, if we are to study certain cultural attributes through Spanish first-names; (3) religious first-names epitomize and indeed reflect the importance of religion and all of its trappings in Hispanic communities because religion (la fe) is--and has been, the glue that has held these communities together; (4) similarly,

double gender names (Albino[a]) enable us to explain the perpetuity and importance of the entire baptismal ritual in an Hispanic community as well as the importance of the compadrazgo/comadrazgo syndrome and the loyalty inherent in these traditions by all parties concerned; (5) Spanish first-names can also reveal insights about certain behaviors, fads, etc., as new first-names appear and others disappear--some forever, I must regretfully confess; and lastly, (6) first-names must be brought to the fore whenever necessary or appropriate; setting aside Fridays for class discussion though, like showing movies only on these days, is perhaps somewhat ill-conceived if not inadvisable for reasons familiar to most of us.

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